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Fruit Belt Neighborhood Asset Inventory

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Fruit Belt Neighborhood Asset Inventory

Abstract

The Fruit Belt is bordered by North Street on the north, Jefferson Street on the east, the Kensington Expressway on the south, and Michigan Street on the west. The Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus (BNMC) lies directly west of the Fruit Belt, across Michigan Street. Historically, the neighborhood was much larger, encompassing the area where the BNMC is now located, and stretching from Main Street in the West to Best Street in the north, and Genesee Street in the east. However, the construction of the Kensington Expressway and the BNMC, as well as other developments in the surrounding area, shrank the neighborhood to its current size.

Keywords

Buffalo, Housing/Neighborhoods, Neighborhood Renewal, Fact Sheet, PPG, PDF

Fruit Belt Neighborhood Asset Inventory

Sara Alpert

Fruit Belt Background

The Fruit Belt is bordered by North Street on the north, Jefferson Street on the east, the Kensington Expressway on the south, and Michigan Street on the west. The Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus (BNMC) lies directly west of the Fruit Belt, across Michigan Street. Historically, the neighborhood was much larger, encompassing the area where the BNMC is now located, and stretching from Main Street in the West to Best Street in the north, and Genesee Street in the east. However, the construction of the Kensington Expressway and the BNMC, as well as other developments in the surrounding area, shrank the neighborhood to its current size.

Established in 1839, the Fruit Belt neighborhood was originally planted with many orchards, giving rise to its unique street names (Cherry Street, Orange Street, Grape Street, etc.). Once home to many German immigrants, the Fruit Belt became predominantly African American in the 1960s and 1970s. Currently, the neighborhood is home to approximately 2,670 persons, of whom 83 percent are African American, 9 percent White, 8 percent other, and 5 percent Hispanic/Latino (this fact sheet uses statistics from census tract 31, which includes most but not all of the Fruit Belt).

The Fruit Belt has struggled with poverty. In 2000, 45 percent of the approximately 3,000 Fruit Belt residents lived in poverty. Income and educational attainment levels in the Fruit Belt are low relative to the City of Buffalo. Of people that are at least twenty-five years old, there is a 53 percent rate of high school degree attainment and 18 percent attainment of a Bachelor's degree or more. The median household income is \$20,047.

Despite economic hurdles, Fruit Belt residents describe their community as tight-knit and family-oriented. In a recent community meeting, residents were informally surveyed about the characteristics in their community that they valued most. Most respondents (23 of 39) identified family, friends, or the people in the community as the most valuable resources in their neighborhood. Other assets listed were the location of the Fruit Belt and the potential in the area. This fact sheet identifies some of the additional assets in the neighborhood, in the hope that these can be preserved, amplified, and made central to all planning for the area.

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Physical Assets

The Fruit Belt neighborhood is home to leafy residential streets, and traditional wood frame homes (although some have been demolished, leaving vacant lots, most of which are owned by the City of Buffalo). The Fruit Belt is within 1 mile of the Buffalo city center. It is a 10-minute walk from the Buffalo metro rail, and it is served by several bus lines.

There are also community gardens in several locations, including at the Marva J. Daniels Futures Preparatory School, the corner of Virginia and Mulberry Streets, the corner of Mulberry and Goodell, and others. There is a playground for five- to twelve-year old children located at 165 Mulberry Street, which was constructed in 2005, resulting from a collaboration of Fruit Belt United, UB Law School, Teen Challenge, Locust Street Art, Daemen College, and Home Depot.



Transportation routes around the Fruit Belt.

Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus

The Buffalo-Niagara Medical Campus (“BNMC”), the region’s largest economic development project, is a consortium of health care, life sciences, and medical education institutions. The nine main partners are Kaleida Health, SUNY Buffalo, Roswell Park Cancer Institute, Hauptman-Woodward Medical Research Institute, Buffalo Medical Group Foundation, Olmstead Center for Sight, Buffalo Hearing and Speech Center, UNYTS, and the Center for Hospice and Palliative Care.

The campus is rapidly expanding, growing from 7,000 employees in 2003 to more than 12,000 employees in 2012, with an expected 17,000 jobs in 2017, by which time the John R. Oishei Children’s Hospital and the SUNY Buffalo Medical School will have moved to the campus. The Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus, Inc. is the non-profit corporation that the member institutions formed to help spur, guide, and manage the development of the campus.

The rapid growth of the BNMC and its vicinity is putting several pressures on the Fruit Belt, including parking congestion, real estate speculation, fast-rising rents, and the potential displacement of residents as they get priced out of the neighborhood. Members of the Fruit Belt, in partnership with other local non-profit groups, have formed the Community First Alliance to help ensure that the community gets benefits and not just burdens from the development, and that residents who wish to stay in the neighborhood are not forced to move.

Educational Institutions

Marva J. Daniel Futures Preparatory School (Futures Academy) (PS 37) (295 Carlton Street)

The public school provides a pre-K to 8th grade education. It is partnered with the University at Buffalo Urban Development Center, Daemen College, and local organizations. Futures Academy participates in local activities such as neighborhood clean-a-thons, mentoring, a summer enrichment program, after school programs, and a collaborative effort with the Locust Street Art Classes program to provide art instruction to local youth. Additionally, Futures Academy was recently selected to be one of thirteen designated community schools across the City of Buffalo with funding received from New York State. The goal of Buffalo's community schools is to extend greater services to students and families, including job training, mentoring, outreach, and health care after school hours. With one-third of Futures students residing within the Fruit Belt, this could be a highly beneficial opportunity for students and their families. UB's Center for Urban Studies has partnered with Futures on a number of programs, including transforming three vacant lots across from the school into a community garden and public art space.

Futures Academy was recently selected to be one of thirteen designated community schools across the City of Buffalo.

Locust Street Art Center (138 Locust Street)

This non-profit organization has a rich fifty-six-year history of providing free and low-cost community art classes, especially for youth, low-income, and minority individuals. Locust Street seeks to develop talent and skills for individuals that are necessary to excel in visual arts. It has a painting studio, a clay classroom with a fully functioning kiln, an animation studio, and a photography room.

The center employs several paid instructors with professional experience in the field. Additionally, they have five high school teen assistants that help maintain the classrooms and undergo professional development throughout their assistantships. Many teen assistants have gone on to work professionally and often return to the studio to pass on their experience as instructors.

Classes are held Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays for any individuals from the age of three to senior citizens, and students can access the studios at all times the center is open. All supplies are provided free. Every June Locust Street hosts an annual art show at which students display work.

City Honors School at Fosdick-Masten Park (186 East North Street)

City Honors hosts grades five to twelve, and is one of the top public schools in Western New York and nationally. Its students come from many different Buffalo neighborhoods, including some from the Fruit Belt. Even though the school is not within the Fruit Belt boundaries as it is defined now, it has the potential to be a strong influence on the community.

Community Organizations

Boy Scout and Cub Scout Troop 237 (237 North Street)

For young men ages 11-17, the Boy Scout and Cub Scout Troop 237 has been in operation for twenty-two years and meets every Monday at 7:00 PM at the Macedonia Baptist Church (237 North Street). The boys learn about outdoor activities and participate in community service such as collecting food from Tops Supermarket and donating it to Macedonia's food pantry. The boys also help local organizations by delivering flyers.

Buffalo Federation of Neighborhood Centers (97 Lemon Street)

The Buffalo Federation of Neighborhood Centers (BFNC) administers a wide variety of programs throughout the city, including the Moot Community Center (292 High Street). The Moot Center provides an array of social, cultural, health, and, wellness opportunities for seniors. These services include: the Moot Cares program which provides health and wellness care coordination, nutrition program Wednesday through Friday, transportation, housing, shopping trips, senior companions, travel clubs, and after-school programs. Additionally, the Moot Center links residents to other community centers operated by the Buffalo Federation of Neighborhood Centers such as the Hope Center for legal assistance, tax preparation and filing, and financial coaching. The Moot Center also hosts representatives from Erie County to meet with community members about county programs such as STAR credit program for homeowners and HEAP.



For the last two summers the Moot Center has hosted the Moot Mobile Market, which is a farmers market truck that is open every Thursday from 11:00 AM to 1:00 PM May through October. It is open not just to seniors but also the general population.

The Moot Center also contains a recently redesigned meeting and activity space that will host meetings, birthday parties, baby and bridal showers, banquets, wedding receptions and church services or programs in the future. The space amenities will include a commercial kitchen which can be used for catering or cooking classes, and a state-of-the-art technology that has created a safe and engaging atmosphere for education, presentations, and information sharing.

Community First Alliance

Formed in 2015, the Community First Alliance is a coalition of 19 organizations of resident groups within the Fruit Belt and partner organizations from across Buffalo formed in order to make sure that the community benefits from the development on and near the Medical Campus.

Fruit Belt Coalition (150 Maple Street)

This non-profit organization formed in 2009 to protect and improve the life of Fruit Belt residents. The Coalition is made up of several other Fruit Belt and community partners and meets the first Monday of every month at Saint John Towers (865 Michigan Ave), focusing on safety, keeping the community clean, and seeking funding for beautification of the neighborhood. They advocate for quality of life issues around the Fruit Belt, including lack of residential parking and waivers for senior citizens to keep their garbage cans closer to the house in the winter.

The Fruit Belt Coalition sends out a newsletter and hosts several events during the year, including a health fair, a spring fling around Easter (which includes an egg hunt), a Christmas in the City event with gifts for neighborhood children, and an annual banquet honoring people in the city. Additionally, they organize the National Night Out event which has the highest attendance of any in the Night Out events in the Ellicott district.

Fruit Belt Homeowners' and Tenants' Council (326 High Street)

This non-profit organization is not a block club, but rather a collective of residents in the area. The organization addresses various issues facing Fruit Belt residents, including development projects, as well as crime and other unwelcome events. The group also helps with taxes for the elderly, food giveaways, and tutoring programs.

Fruit Belt/McCarley Gardens Housing Task Force

This organization has worked to protect the McCarley Gardens residents from displacement as well as on issues such as parking and gentrification affecting the entire Fruit Belt.

Fruit Belt United

Fruit Belt United Inc. is a non-profit organization that was founded in 1996 by 25 volunteers who were raised in the community. This non-profit organization mainly works with youth in the area, by promoting educational and recreational activities. They also hope to promote healthy relationships among families and community members that support social, physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual growth. Fruit Belt United was involved with building the playground on Mulberry Street. Every summer they offer a free cook out with food and games and a play space. They also organize father/daughter dances, memorial ceremonies, and an annual Father's day boat ride.

In 2016, the Fruit Belt United started the Gary L. Milton Memorial Community Scholarship for any high school senior and first year college student pursuing an undergraduate degree at an institution of higher learning to provide financial assistance for college. In 2016, two scholarships will be awarded for \$500 each; the group hopes to continue making the awards each year. Fruit Belt United meets the first Monday of each month at the Pilgrim Baptist Church at 665 Michigan Ave.

Omega Mentoring Program (Jonny B. Wiley Stadium)

The mission of Omega is to help youth to stay off the street by mentoring both young men and women ages 12-15 at the Johnnie B. Wiley Stadium.

Orchard Community Initiative (John B. Wiley Stadium)

This is a solution-focused organization formed by the graduates of the leadership development course provided by the BNMC in 2013. The goals of the organization are to improve education and employment opportunities in the Fruit Belt. They offer a seniors computer class, home buyer education, credit counseling, New York State employment services, and a newsletter. Their offices also host a computer lab, media room, and a copier available to the community.

Teen Challenge International, USA (124 Locust Street)

Teen Challenge is a Christian non-profit organization with locations nationwide that focuses on helping young men combat addictions by providing a comprehensive faith-based long-term residential treatment approach to lifestyle change, which includes vocational training and community involvement. They also offer various programming, such as the Student and Family Enrichment to bridge the gap between their students and family members while further promoting recovery and healthy lives of students and their family.

Teen Challenge has a location in the Fruit Belt that works with the community, and is involved in a multitude of activities, including: tending to Fruit Belt community gardens; assisting elderly residents with snow removal and yard work; community clean ups; and speaking engagements with local schools and colleges where men in the program share their experiences. Teen Challenge cooperates with various local organizations, such as the Urban Christian Ministries, Fruit Belt United, and the Fruit Belt Coalition on events such as the National Night Out. The Teen Challenge center also maintains "King Court" which is a basketball court for residents that is also open for community children and members.

Urban Christian Ministries (967 Jefferson Avenue)

This organization is a non-profit non-denominational Christian home missionary program that serves the youth in inner city Buffalo, including the Fruit Belt. Founded in 1970, this organization has been providing youth activities and resources, such as a kids' club, afterschool programming, mentoring services, basketball club, a Confidence and Conditioning program, summer camps, mission trips, food and clothing pantry (Tuesday, Thursday, Friday, 11:00 AM-2:00 PM), and a free community meal the second Saturday of every month.

Churches

Faith Apostolic Church of Christ (358 E North St)

First Centennial Baptist Church (273-299 High Street)

The church hosts events including in 2016 a first annual Octoberfest that had health care professionals and teachers in attendance to offer tips.

Gethsemane Baptist Church (55 Grape Street)

Greater Refuge Temple of Christ (943 Jefferson Ave)

The Greater Refuge Temple of Christ has a long history of expansion and growth dating back to 1937. The church not only provides religious services but also serves as an education and cultural center. Programs and services offered include a focus on an inclusive environment for all with a special emphasis on the community's youth and senior citizens. They offer a Food Pantry operated by Western New York Food Bank on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays from 11:00 AM-1:00 PM.

Macedonia Baptist Church (237 East North Street)

The Macedonia Baptist Church began 1921 in Depew, New York. In 1941 the church was moved to 468 Jefferson Avenue where it was incorporated as the Macedonia Baptist Church. The church moved to 511 Michigan Avenue, which is now recognized as a historic site for its role in the Underground Railroad, helping runaway slaves escape bondage. Due to an increase in membership, in 1974 the church was relocated to 237 East North Street. On Wednesdays, Macedonia Baptist opens a soup kitchen from 11:00 AM-1:00 PM, provides a food pantry from 3:00-5:00 PM, regular prayer at 6:00 PM, and bible study at 6:30 PM. They also offer regular Youth Ministry Fridays at 7:00 PM, Sunday school at 10:00 AM, Sunday church services at 11:00 AM, and a Women's Group dedicated to empowerment the fourth Saturday of every month.

New Mt. Ararat Temple of Prayer (971-983 Jefferson Avenue)

New Mt. Ararat Temple of the Prayer is a Baptist church founded in 1963 on Clinton Street and moved to Jefferson Avenue in 1965. The mission of the church is to aid in providing food, water, medical care, disaster relief, shelter and clothing. The church provides daily prayer and regular workshops. Additionally, the church offers programming to youth including Sunday school, youth church, youth curriculum, and activities including Dance Team, Youth Department Newsletter, Praise Team, Game/Fellowship Nights, Youth Explosion, Christmas Production, New Year's Eve Concert, and Youth Sundays on 5th Sundays. In the summer of 2016, the church participated in partnership with Say Yes to Education program and hosted a half day summer camp Monday through Friday for approximately thirty neighborhood children.

New Zion Baptist Church (318 High Street)

New Zion Baptist Church provides housing to some members of the church as well as hosts a Family and Friends Activity Day for the community once a year in August. Family and Friends Day has local vendors, health awareness with speakers from the health department, activities for children, and food.

Old Landmark Church of God in Christ (896 Jefferson Avenue)

The church features Sunday school for children, Sunday morning worship services, and a Friday night prayer and bible study.

Promised Land Missionary Baptist Church (227 High Street)**St. John Baptist Church (184 Goodell St)**

Founded in 1927, St John Baptist Church is a 3,800-member congregation housed on a 45 acre campus located in close proximity to BNMC. The church established many developments that provide services to the Fruit Belt community, including:

Rev. Dr. Bennett W. Smith Sr. Family Life Center (833 Michigan Avenue)

A 30,000 square foot activity center that provides health care such as Orthosports Physical Therapy, Universal Chiropractic at Century Wellness, health screening; education, and recreational opportunities, including athletic activities; art, music and dance classes; after school programs; computer literacy; and Erma D. Robinson Universal Center, a 23-hour daycare program child care.

St. John Christian Academy (184 Goodell Street)

An early childhood, day care center for preschool and kindergarten aged children.

St. John Towers (865 Michigan Avenue)

The Towers provide about 150 living spaces for seniors in clean, decent, safe, and affordable housing. All units are one bedroom with air conditioning, fridge, electric stove, carpeted, garbage disposals, and emergency call buttons. The towers also provide emergency transportation to places like the doctor's office. They also seek to enrich senior's lives with activities such as bowling leagues, trips, and social events with other senior complexes in Buffalo. The towers also have a senior service coordinator on staff that assists seniors by linking them to resources such as the Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). The staff also hosts financial literacy workshops, including financial management and how to be on the alert for fraud.

McCarley Gardens (818 Michigan Ave)

Developed by St. John Baptist Church, this is a townhouse style housing complex of 150 units of various sizes including two-, three- and four-bedroom tri-level apartments. The rent is based

on income and includes many amenities, such as full size basements with laundry hookups and twenty-four-hour emergency maintenance.

St. John's also created multiple corporations, including a credit union, several community development corporations, and a real estate corporation. These include M.C. Creative Thinkers, Oak-Michigan Housing Development Corporation, St. John Federal Credit Union, and St. John Fruit Belt Community Development Corporation

Businesses

Allscripts (173 High Street)

Pharmacy.

Ben's Coiffures, Ltd. (150 Maple Street)

This is a salon owned and operated by Dr. Benjamin Cashaw, Fruit Belt Coalition president.

Big Basha Market (845 Jefferson Avenue)

A small grocery convenience store, including beauty items such as wigs.

Big Basha Central (844 Jefferson Avenue)

A clothing and sneaker store selling brand names such as Nike.

Carl & Jeff Barbershop (859 Jefferson Avenue)

Established in 1968, Carl and Jeff Barbershop is open Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday until 6:00 PM. They open as early as 7:30 AM every day except Wednesday.

Citywide Food & Beauty Supply (137 Maple Street)

Citywide has an ATM, UPS service, ability to pay bills, purchase beauty supplies such as wigs, convenience products, and deli.

High St Deli (195 High Street)

A local deli that also partners with community groups by helping to sponsor the Fruit Belt Coalition's Christmas in the City.

Island Mix (883 Jefferson Avenue)

Prepared by a highly experienced chef, Island Mix features authentic Caribbean food and drinks including daily specials.

Golden Cup Coffee (883 Jefferson Avenue)

Open 7:00AM-7:00PM Monday through Saturday (and until 3:00PM on Sundays) the Golden Cup Café is both a coffee roaster and a café serving a wide variety of coffee drinks, sandwiches, wraps, soups, and salads, with wi-fi connectivity. These blends are also sold through their office and commercial services to other locations around Buffalo. They also have fundraiser packages so groups can sell their special mixes to fundraise for local organizations. Golden Cup offers a space to book for groups, celebrations or special events in its warm and contemporary atmosphere.

H Alfred Lewis Mortuary Inc (968 Jefferson Avenue)**Je Ne Sais Quoi (893 Jefferson Avenue)**

Opened in 2016, this Southern comfort food restaurant is open Thursday through Sunday from 11:00 AM to 8:00 PM, serving until the last taste is gone. The owner Gwen takes pride in her delicious food and started the restaurant because she likes to see a smile on peoples' faces.

The Lemon Spot (170 Lemon Street)

Auto body, detailing, and repair shop.

Mr. Kones (893 Jefferson Avenue)

This is a seasonal food stop that is open April through October from 12:00 to 8:00 PM. They serve ice cream, hot dogs, hamburgers, sandwiches, chicken fingers, and chicken wings.

Mulberry Bush Family Day Care (235 Mulberry Street)**Shop n Go (984 Jefferson Avenue)**

Convenience store.

Special Things (150 Maple Street)

This small boutique sells hair and clothing supplies.

Tiny Tots Daycare (57 Peach Street)**Twisted Pickle Take Out Restaurant (173 High Street)**

Provides both take out and some seated dining indoors. It is open for breakfast and lunch Monday, Tuesday, and Saturday, with dinner hours Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday.

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